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THE NEW PATH.

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and the things that shall be hereafter." [Sept., 1863.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF NATURE.

Introductory.

MANY pens are already at work in the endeavor to conduce to the enrichment and elucidation of Art and Science; and, in venturing myself to add a few words on this subject, I do so solely from a desire to aid the removal and suppression of some peculiarities, but too prevalent, in the present mode of writing on Art. My chief object at the present time is, to direct attention to early artistic education; and, by unfolding my views and mode of conception, to suggest that help which seems most needed.

Every true artist will agree with me, that the fundamental, and consequently most important, step in artistic education is the training of the eye into harmony with the development of the mind. It is an old story, yet always new, that the labor of thinking is indispensable in the life of all classes of men; and with regard to artistic studies, which are intimately related to observation and reflection, it is surely most necessary that, from the commencement, mind and eye should be educated together. Indeed it is this precise education which so completely distinguishes and elevates every genuine artist. This every-day world he regards from an entirely different point of view, recognizing in nature a multitude of charms, and discovering in her inexhaustible treasures of a purer knowledge, which from others are for-

ever hidden. It is his constant habit of uniting seeing with thinking which endows him with the power of understanding aright, where an undisciplined eye perceives nothing save hieroglyphics.

Now, in suggesting the means of procuring such an education, first I would state, that I entirely agree with those of my fellow-artists, who condemn the practice of constant mechanical copying, and endeavor rather to lead the students entrusted to their care, as early as possible, to the only original source and productive fountain—

Nature.

Drawing from the object itself, instead of from copies, necessarily compels the student to think, and in a short time imparts to him a power of perception utterly unattainable by any other method. The student's attention should also at once be directed to the fact that, prior to any attempt to delineate, and in order to give anything like an adequate representation of the object placed before him, it is absolutely imperative, closely to observe and to examine every object *as a whole*, that is, in its general appearance, and therefore necessarily, at the same time, to observe also all those parts of which this appearance is composed. This examination must be sufficiently prolonged, to allow the mind a fair opportunity of seeing and retaining accurate impres-

sions of both form and color. By a discipline, as here described, every line, every touch, becomes replete with character, and tells its own story, whereas every other method is not only inferior, but, in point of fact, pernicious in influence, and conduces to a style of drawing which, being altogether deficient in character, is therefore utterly worthless. However, in this drawing from nature, some preparatory study is clearly needful, which should advance and keep pace with it; for when the seed, which the teacher sows, does not fall into well-prepared soil, and is not quickened by the aid of rain and sunshine, the prospect of an abundant harvest is more than doubtful.

Now this preparatory study—the *science of seeing*—commonly called *perspective*, is the only true guide that will ensure real competency to represent faithfully the varieties of appearances presented by natural objects, in accordance with their retrogression from the eye. The image of every object in nature upon which the eye can rest is exquisitely impressed in form and color, upon that most delicate membrane, the retina, according to the unchangeable laws of the *perspective of nature*. In truth, this latter is the magic key that opens to the student the entrance to the mysteries of his art, and the supposition that any artist can dispense with it, will speedily prove itself a fatal error. The student who attempts to draw from nature without being guided by perspective, will often find himself in fault; and much retarded by the expenditure of precious time: fearful ever of falling into fresh error, he will not so expeditiously and certainly attain the faculty of reproducing nature on the canvass with truth and feeling, as he might have done, had he only had the right guidance from the beginning.

Perspective—the science of seeing—must, as already told, *be taught in progressive connection with the close observation of nature*; and, in that case, I have no hesitation in saying, that the acquisition of a knowledge of it will be found in nowise a difficult matter. The instructor should also possess a taste and knowledge sufficient to enable him to avoid everything strictly mathematical, and to reduce the whole to simple principles, in which case the student cannot fail, at length, to arrive at the conclusion, that what is current under the name “*Perspective*,” is, in fact nothing but a most requisite accessory in art—namely, *the power of seeing accurately*.

Nevertheless, no one can be more fully aware than I, of the number of scruples and difficulties to be overcome, ere pupils can be incited to the study of perspective, especially when taught in that irrational manner so generally adopted. Too many mathematical subtleties are apt to alarm beginners, and fill them with a natural aversion, which deters them from penetrating through the shell to the sound and healthy kernel.

With the avowed object of naturalizing perspective, numbers of books have been written, and are continually appearing, though the result, I feel sure is entirely different from that intended. For example, how repelling it is to the beginner, and perfectly ridiculous to the artist, if he sees that simply to draw a chair, box, etc., etc., he has to penetrate such an alarming intricate web of lines, before he can, and then only with difficulty, observe the required object itself. Moreover some of the laws of the so-called perspective, given in the majority of books, are entirely opposed to those laws, which the only true *perspective of nature* dictates. But more of this in its proper place. No critique, I feel

sure, can be too point-blank, in order to combat effectually this thoughtless fashion of needlessly perplexing the learner. Another impediment, increasing the difficulties of inciting some pupils to study perspective, is the damaging circumstances, that even leading writers on art have treated it with such comparative indifference; although, of course, they are themselves fully aware of its true importance in a fundamental point of view, and only solicitous that learners should avoid giving it undue weight, in a way that would be derogatory to other studies. It is this comparative indifference on the subject, indulged in by some writers, which has given rise to the absurd—and, for the idle, welcome—notion, that perspective is without any substantial value whatever. No real artist will be at all likely to misapprehend the true significance of this apparent slight cast upon perspective by some writers, or be in the smallest degree disconcerted thereby; but, unfortunately, the multitude, amongst whom might be named especially those who possess a singular dexterity in devouring voluptuously the contents of a multiplicity of books, but familiarize themselves only with the crust; this multitude, I say, is only too apt to follow blindly, the writers of the most notoriety; and no sooner is anything asserted by them, than the multitude, parrot-like, chatters it glibly forth, all the while lacking the requisite powers

of scrutiny, yet possessing a singular proneness for talking, plausibly and speciously, of subjects it does not understand.

Lastly, in concluding these remarks, I take it for granted no real artist will accuse me of depreciating other studies out of regard for perspective. Knowing well that undue prominence given to one branch of study would most surely prove an obstruction to the student, aware of the saying, that

“Where fashion throws her chain,
True art can ne’er remain;”

nevertheless, I recommend the study of perspective, founded on the intimate observation of nature, from the first, as an absolutely necessary, sure and faithful guide for every student of art. It must be taught and practised early, otherwise the eye falls into a loose and imperfect habit of study. In such a case it is then only with the greatest difficulty—if at all—that the student can rectify such unprofitable and pernicious groundwork. But even to—so called—artists, who have neglected perspective in former years, I would earnestly recommend the culture of perspective simultaneously with their other studies. I admonish them to reflect that, seeing the last step has been only a retreat, the return to a former position will become a real advance. The foundation of all real improvement, is the recognition of an evil.

M. LE VENGEUR D’ARCY.

“How bountiful is Nature! he shall find
Who seeks not; and to him who hath not asked
Large measure shall be dealt.

Wordsworth.